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Have you heard about the GrOW program?

Our series is the official research platform for the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program. Learn more about the GrOW program below.

Around the world women's participation in economic activities is increasing, but they continue to face challenges accessing decent and secure employment and accumulating assets. These challenges include discriminatory social norms that limit women's choices and opportunities, and constraints imposed by women's dual roles as caregivers and breadwinners. There is insufficient knowledge about how to overcome these challenges. The GrOW program aims to fill that gap.

GrOW is a five-year, multi-funder partnership between the UK Government's Department for International Development, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). With 14 projects in 50 countries, GrOW aims to strengthen the evidence base on women's economic growth and empowerment, while simultaneously enhancing the capacity of southern-based researchers to produce high-quality work and promote research use by decision-makers.

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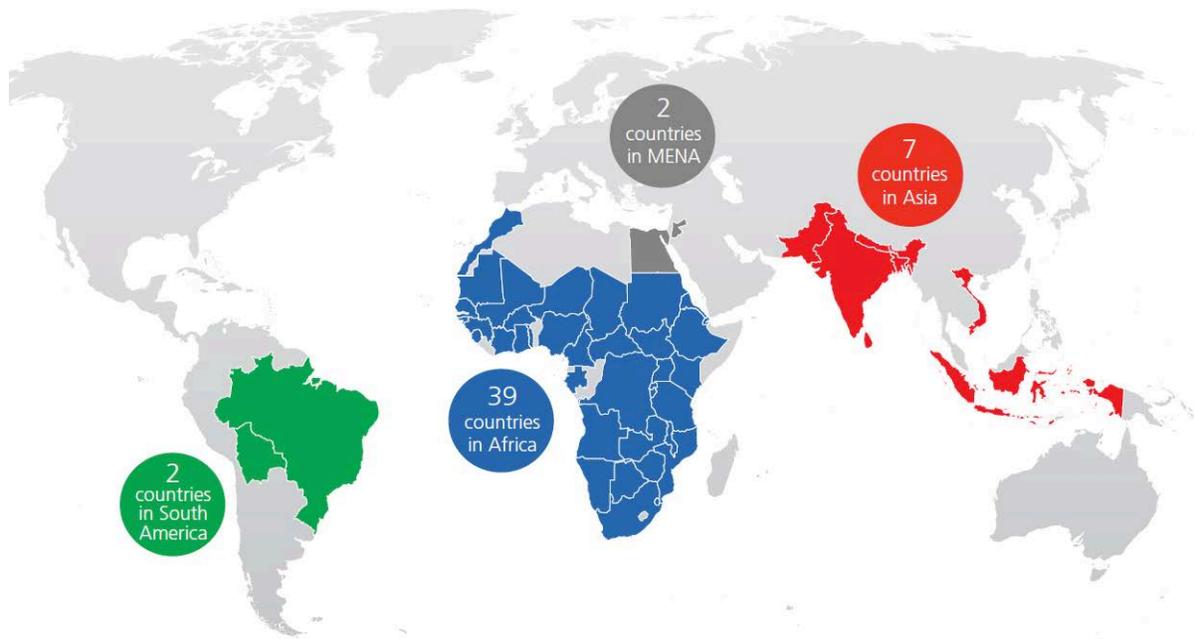
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GrOW works with researchers to improve economic outcomes and opportunities for poor women on the themes of employment, the care economy, and women's economic agency. To achieve its goals the program emphasizes:

Generating new and rigorous evidence: With research projects taking place in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and South America, GrOW works with research teams to ensure that their work is methodologically sound and innovative, combining multi-method and inter-disciplinary approaches. Results are validated by a community of peers, including through publication in peer-reviewed journals and in the GrOW Research Series.

Learning and policy outreach: GrOW promotes peer learning and knowledge exchange between research partners to ensure cross-pollination of best practices and lessons learned. The program also stimulates policy dialogue, by helping researchers develop strategies for engaging with relevant policymakers and practitioners, and facilitating these interactions through efforts like conferences, workshops and webinars. A key objective of the program is to ensure the use of research for policy development at the local, regional and international levels.

Synthesis and dissemination of results:

Through working papers, policy briefs and other communication strategies, GrOW synthesizes and disseminates evidence on what works, and does not work, to economically empower women and promote growth.

GrOW Research Series is the official, though not exclusive, research platform for the GrOW program. The series brings together scholarly research on women's economic empowerment and economic growth in low-income countries, and provides a conceptual and empirical basis for policy-making. It is housed at the Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID) at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. As part of a broader initiative by ISID and IDRC, this series disseminates GrOW research, including working papers and policy briefs, on an open access online platform.

For more information about the GrOW program, visit:

<https://www.idrc.ca/en/initiative/growth-and-economic-opportunities-women>

For information about the GrOW Research Series, visit: <http://grow.research.mcgill.ca/>

Talking Research, Gender and Entrepreneurship at the 2017 PEP Annual Conference

By Jennie Hurwood

On June 14, the Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP) – in line with its commitment to promoting gender equality – hosted a high-level policy forum discussing how to promote female and youth entrepreneurship, and a research forum on gender analysis, as part of its 2017 Annual Conference in Nairobi, Kenya.

During the Policy Forum, the results and recommendations from PEP projects investigating the constraints to female entrepreneurship in seven developing countries were discussed with policymakers, researchers, and practitioners, including a representative of UN Women Kenya. Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs officially opened the event. The speakers argued that to promote female entrepreneurship in developing countries policies must address structural forms of discrimination against women.

The question of how to produce gender-sensitive research, including how to recognize structural discrimination, was explored during the Research Forum. Moderated by Arjan de Haan from Canada's IDRC, three expert panelists discussed the importance of gender analysis and offered useful insights and practical advice to PEP researchers who are required to incorporate gender analysis into their research.

Dr James Heintz from the US's Political Economy Research Institute argued research without gender analysis is not gender neutral but gender blind. He encouraged researchers to investigate structural gender inequalities that are often ignored, such as the division of labour by gender. "If we exclude unpaid household work, we end up with very biased policies," he said.



Photo: PEP Research Forum 2017

Dr Dileni Gunewardena from the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka promoted the practice of analyzing data for women and men separately, giving examples of studies where the results were not significant until separated by gender. She also explained how existing national and international databases contain intra-household information, e.g. education levels and labour allocation, which can be used for gender analysis.

Finally, Dr Caroline Kabiru presented evidence from GrOW-supported research demonstrating the importance of mixed methods for gender analysis. By combining quantitative methods (surveys) with qualitative methods (focus groups, interviews, creative projects), the team was able to more fully explore the impact of the intervention to provide affordable childcare on the economic opportunities for women in Nairobi slums, ensuring local relevance and community engagement.

PEP is a global organization working to build local capacity in providing contextualized policy solutions for sustainable development. Of the 800+ researchers supported by PEP to date, 46% are women. Entrepreneurship for women's empowerment and poverty reduction has been a central theme in PEP-supported research since 2012, with gender and women's economic empowerment becoming key focuses for 2016-2020.

Jennie Hurwood is a Communications Officer at PEP.



Feature Piece

Entrepreneurship is not for everyone. We need more good jobs with decent wages and social benefits.

By Bipasha Baruah

Entrepreneurship has been promoted as a cure-all to generate employment for women's economic survival almost everywhere in the world. This trend has peaked over the past 20 years during which most countries liberalized their economies and embraced globalization. Entrepreneurship can certainly benefit some women and it is important to continue providing support to optimize women's entrepreneurial pursuits. However, it is also important to recognize that entrepreneurship is often not a realistic employment solution for some, particularly low-income, women. Research conducted around the world demonstrates that even well-intentioned interventions by governments, NGOs, private sector organizations and social enterprises fail to level the playing field for all women to become successful entrepreneurs. This is precisely why poorer women worldwide generally tend to be more interested in stable wage employment rather than entrepreneurship.

Given these limitations, it is important to refocus attention in the future to the creation of jobs with decent wages and good social benefits. Focusing on creating decent wage employment and expanding and improving social protection will also benefit women who choose to pursue entrepreneurship since there is mounting evidence that self-employed women continue to face the challenge of creating stable sources of income. The tenuousness of entrepreneurship and the absence or unevenness of social safety nets in different countries highlight the need for governments to provide adequate social security to protect against vagaries in the market, natural

disasters, illness, maternity, old age, job losses and other risks to people's well-being. I would like to take it a step further and emphasize that providing social protection within a human-rights framework and delinking social security from employment status is a strategy worth pursuing worldwide. It is difficult to be innovative in creating new sources of employment when people lack basic social security. The availability of universal social protection would enable us to be more resourceful and effective at creating and optimizing employment opportunities for everyone.

Within a broader conversation about job creation and social protection, it is important to create and optimize opportunities for women in lucrative non-traditional fields such as the energy sector, transportation services, and skilled construction that have, for the most part, remained inaccessible for women almost everywhere in the world. Over the past decade, I have studied women's employment in a series of such non-traditional occupations and some common findings emerge from this research. I found that education, training, certification and employment placement can play an important role in providing skilled women with quality employment opportunities in non-traditional occupations but wider policy intervention is also needed at municipal, state and national levels to ensure that such programs have replicable, sustainable, and gender-equitable results.

Whether women will be able to incrementally build on the gains they have made in these occupations will depend on several factors, including continued support from governments, civil society organizations and the private sector; scaling up access to training and certification to include larger numbers of women; and wider public policy interventions to ensure that women are not easily rendered jobless by changes in the national and global economy. It is also important to bear in mind that legal interventions and policy reforms do little or nothing to challenge



the underlying social norms, hierarchies, customs and taboos that inhibit women's participation in non-traditional occupations. Education and consciousness-raising initiatives that raise awareness among women as well as men about women's equal entitlements to quality employment are just as crucial as policy reforms and state and civil society actions that protect women's interests and facilitate their agency. Women can benefit optimally from paid employment only within the context of wider socially progressive policies and more transformative shifts in societal attitudes about gender roles. This is as true for developing countries and emerging economies as it is for industrialized nations.

Focusing on increasing women's participation in male-dominated occupations such as construction and transportation does not mean that we should not be concerned about how undervalued and underpaid women are in stereotypically feminized occupations such as domestic work, early childhood education and retail services in which they are the majority. Improving the status, wages and working conditions for people working in female-dominated sectors is as important as increasing women's participation in well-compensated male-dominated occupations. The two strategies should be complementary rather than mutually exclusive.



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The GrOW Research Series brings together scholarly research on women's economic empowerment and growth in low-income countries, and provides a conceptual and empirical basis for policy-making. It is also the official research platform for the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program. This series is housed at the Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID) at McGill University in Montreal.

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